

# TEXT CULTURE TO 56512

to explore everything arts, history and culture!



## Middlesex County Board of Chosen Freeholders

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## Middlesex County Department of Business Development & Education

### Office of Arts & History

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[www.middlesexcountynj.gov](http://www.middlesexcountynj.gov)



— 2017 - 2021 —

Middlesex County Office of Arts and History

## REGIONAL CULTURAL PLAN



The Middlesex County Office of Arts and History develops and funds programs throughout the County that promote public interest in local and County history, in the arts and in the cultural values, goals and traditions of the community, the State and the nation.



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### VISION

All residents of Middlesex County have the opportunity to access and participate in the arts, culture and history that enrich their lives.

### MISSION

Improve the quality of life for all residents of the County by investing in arts and history.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On June 1, 2017, The Board of Chosen Freeholders approved a strategic Regional Cultural Plan to guide the investment of significant resources in the County's arts, culture and history assets for the benefit of all residents of Middlesex County. The Plan serves as a roadmap to guide the County through 2020, to achieve its aspiration that: ***All residents of Middlesex County have the opportunity to access and participate in the arts, culture and history that enrich their lives.***

The aspiration and the detailed set of goals, strategies and tactics that serve as the plan's foundation came through a rigorous process of analysis, research and inquiry, completed to guide the creation of a "best in class" roadmap for the County. Extensive economic and demographic analysis was completed, and inputs and data were gathered and analyzed from national experts in arts and history, County and municipal leadership, arts and history funders, school districts, nonprofit organizations providing arts and history programming, and consumers of arts and culture throughout the County.

The resulting Regional Cultural Plan positions the County as a regional leader in arts, history and, more comprehensively, in economic development. The following summary contains the key goals that provide the foundation for the plan, and the rationale behind why the Board of Chosen Freeholders has chosen to focus on these areas to drive the County forward.

## VALUES AND BELIEFS

We exist for the benefit of three core constituencies:

1. The Residents of Middlesex County
2. The Arts and History Organizations and Individuals that serve our residents
3. The Municipalities that make up the County

- Diversity is a core strength of our County and should be encouraged, celebrated and preserved.
- Arts and history enrich the quality of life of residents of Middlesex County.
- Arts and history drive economic development, vibrancy and a sense of community.
- The County is only as strong as our Municipalities, and we see ourselves as an ingredient in their success.
- Partnership and collaboration allows us to do our best work by leveraging the full assets of the community.
- Data and measurement are a core part of our process and ground our decision-making.
- We seek to be best in class in our programs and services, and look outward for inspiration and feedback.
- We are active listeners, regularly seeking out and integrating the views and opinions of those we serve.
- We recognize and respect the community's trust and are dedicated to transparency in all we do.
- Exceptional leadership is at the core of our community's success and long-term sustainability, and we are dedicated to leadership and capacity development throughout the arts and history sectors.

## GOALS, STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

To advance our vision and mission, in service to our Core Constituencies, and in keeping with our values and beliefs, we have set the following goals, to be achieved in the next five years.

### Supporting Great Arts and History in Our Neighborhoods

**GOAL 1: Use Arts and History as a means to build community in municipalities throughout the County.**

National studies support the benefits the arts provide as an engine for both community and economic development. Place-based arts and culture make for more viable, sustainable communities that are also attractive to younger generations, who prefer neighborhoods that are walkable and where there is a strong sense of place. Investments here can build that fabric. Assisting in capacity building for those organizations is a significant opportunity for the County.

### Ensuring Sustainability of Our Investments

**GOAL 2: Protect and leverage the significant operating and capital investments the County makes through the Cultural & Arts Fund, with an eye on long-term sustainability.**

The County has dedicated significant funding to strategic bricks and mortar projects and operating support that will deliver great value to the community. To ensure that these investments provide broad-based and sustainable ROI, funding should be based on metrics and data to ensure that capital investments are not made without accompanying market demand. Additionally, investments must go hand-in-hand with the commitment of partner communities where investments are made, and with the assurance that organizations and groups throughout the County will derive benefit from the investments.

### Ensuring Best Practice Grant Making Across All County Programs

**GOAL 3: Align all County Arts and History grant programs – adhering to best practices to most effectively serve the needs of the community, tell the County's compelling story, and support best practices set forth in the policies established by the Board of Chosen Freeholders.**

Aligning all County Arts and History grant programs will create a more navigable path for arts and history organizations for which County funding is available, and allow the County to more efficiently build awareness for the work it does. Additionally, doing so will enable the Board of Chosen Freeholders to realize its commitment to being a "best in class" funder by bringing all of its funding programs into alignment with national best practices, and to do so in the most cost effective way.

### Strengthening Arts Education for Our Children and Youth

**GOAL 4: Advocate for strengthening arts education in Middlesex County public schools by partnering with community leaders and professionals.**

New Jersey is a recognized nationally for its commitment to arts curriculum in schools. The County recognizes the importance of arts literacy in the development of the County's young people, and the importance of those young people to our community. Using the rich and varied resources of our community, the County will seek out, convene and actively engage in efforts to strengthen arts-based education and programming in schools.

### Building Organizational Capacity to Serve Our Community

**GOAL 5: Build a strong County Office of Arts and History to provide best in class grants and programs.**

Achieving the goals of the plan will require investments to grow capacity of the County's operations, specifically, investments in: technology to measure impact; website and social media tools to more effectively communicate with the County's constituencies; systems platforms to more effectively connect the sector; grant processing and administration upgrades to properly steward the County's investment; and capacity building programs to help ensure that the County's organizations get the leadership development and technical skills they need to sustain their organizations.